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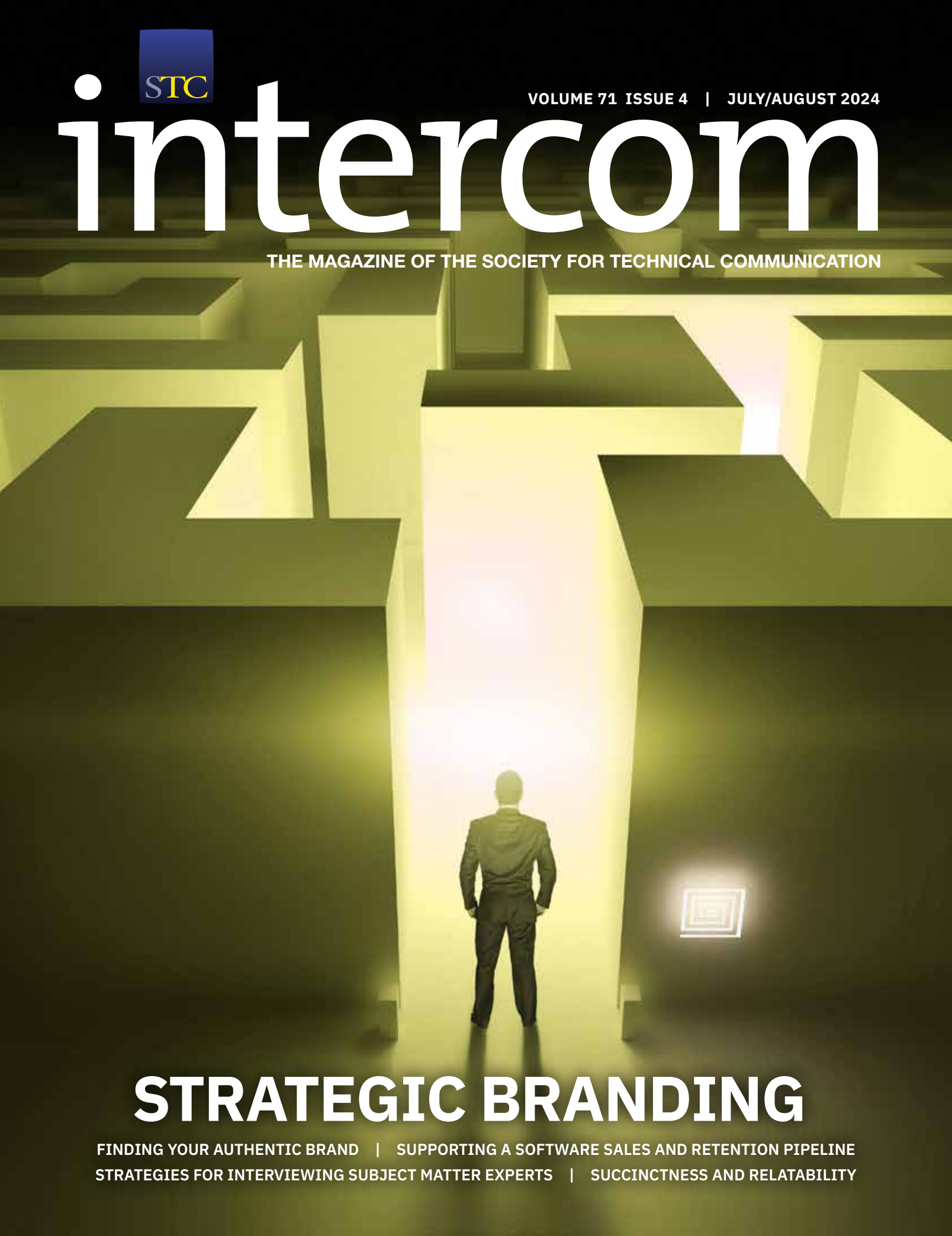

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A Note from the Editor

Our July/August 2024 issue explores strategic branding from both personal and professional perspectives. A key question this issue addresses is *how are brands developed, sustained, and improved upon*, whether a particular brand represents an individual or key product/service? Features from Leah Gurin, Michael Opsteegh, and Kevin Meglic discuss specific techniques used in creating successful brands, which you can implement into your own personal and professional work. Also in this issue, you'll find featured articles on interviewing Subject Matter Experts and the changing role of technical editing. Our first of two featured columns this month, describes how the Technical Communication Body of Knowledge (TCBOK) can be used as a research tool for generating new ideas in your technical communication work. Through a short series of case study examples, this column provides a simple walkthrough for those unfamiliar with using the TCBOK in this way. And our spotlight feature remembers STC Fellow, Antony Rhodes-Marriott, who helped found the Toronto and Winnipeg chapters.

In case you weren't able to attend, this issue includes featured content from the recent STC Summit held in Bloomington, Minnesota, from 16-19 May 2024. This month's President's Letter from Dr. Liz Herman provides her insights and some useful feedback from attendees, as well as a message of encouragement for us to look forward to next year's event. You'll also find a list of this year's awards and recipients from both recognition ceremonies, so be sure to pass along your congratulations to our honorees. And as a special treat, print copies of our previous issue on Structured Authoring were available to attendees as a takeaway from the Summit event. A special thanks goes out to our conference chairs, committee members, organizers, presenters, staff, and volunteers for helping make this year's Summit a success.

For upcoming issue topics, be sure to visit our editorial calendar found on the STC website at https://www.stc.org/intercom/editorial-calendar/, which includes important author submission guidelines. While each upcoming issue has a specific topic, *Intercom* welcomes other articles of professional interest to technical communicators of all expertise levels. To submit an article for publication, or to simiply ask a question, email us at intercom-editor@stc.org. ■

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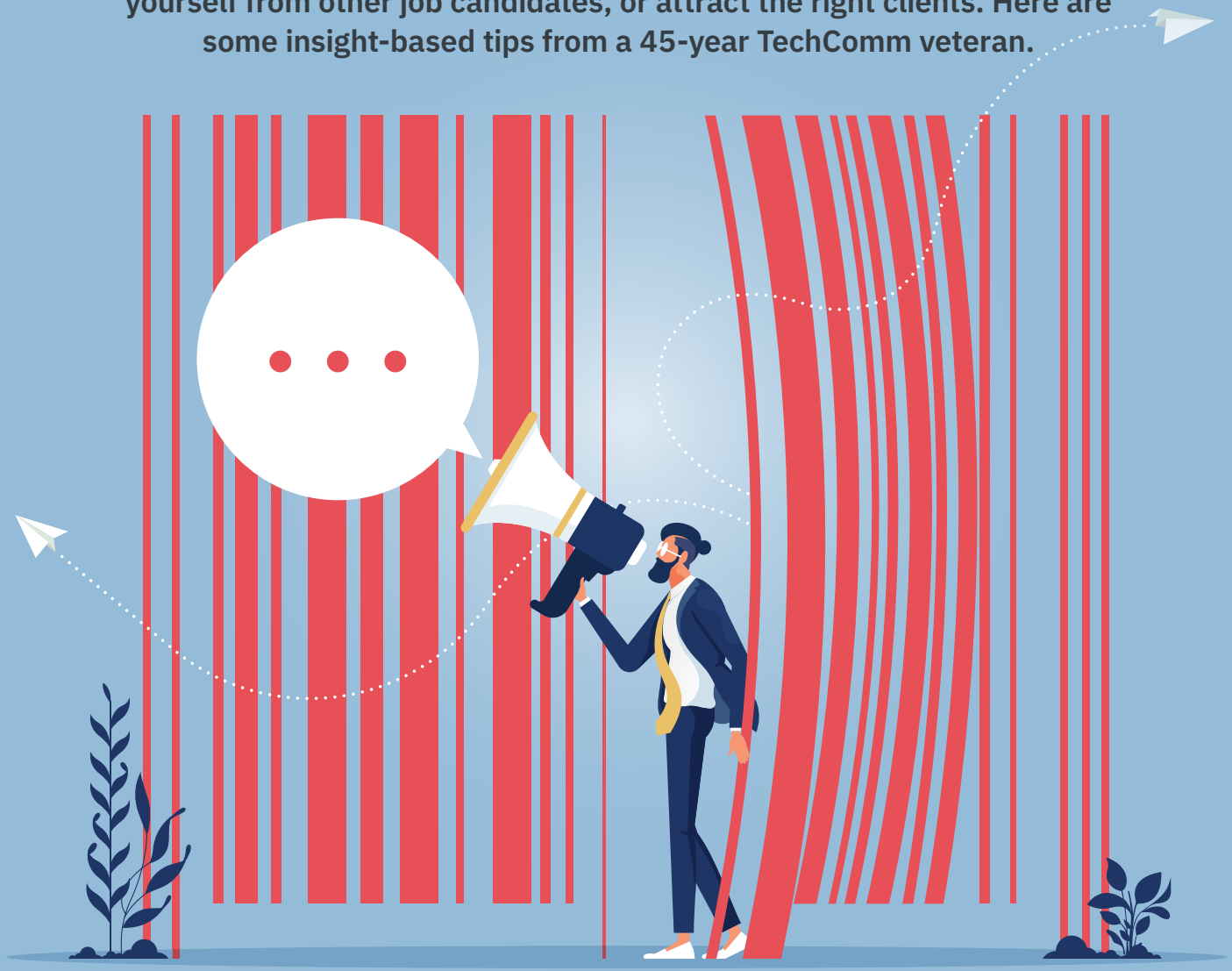
Finding Your Authentic Brand

By Leah Guren, Cow TC | Fellow

Your personal brand is a unique combination of skills, traits, knowledge, aptitudes, personal preferences, and qualities. It helps you distinguish yourself from other job candidates, or attract the right clients. Here are some insight-based tips from a 45-year TechComm veteran.



I consider myself fortunate to be able to look back on 44 years in this fascinating field of TechComm. Our profession is broad and varied; we are found in almost every domain, in most companies, and all over the world. The sweeping nature of our profession means that it covers more skills, tools, knowledge, and areas of niche specialization than one person could ever master. Thus, every TechComm practitioner, whether independent or an employee, should seriously think about identifying their brand.

What do I mean by *brand*? Your brand is your area of specialty (skills, tools, domain knowledge) plus your qualities and aptitudes, that together identify you within a competitive industry. It is the professional identity that is meaningful to you, and that you wish to project to the world when marketing yourself. Remember, our profession is so complex that no one can do everything. Someone who spends their career documenting software is going to have a different set of experiences and skills than someone who works in the healthcare industry.

Unfortunately, many people starting their TechComm career simply go with the flow. Their career path ends up being dictated by their first job, and they may never put in the (sometimes painful) effort of self-assessment and career planning. But without taking a personal inventory and thinking about long-term goals, they risk drifting through a series of jobs, rather than enjoying a stimulating and rewarding career.

I am happy to share with you my background and the path to developing my authentic brand.

Luck, Timing, and Opportunity

In 1980, I was partway through my degree (Computer Science and Political Science), enjoying the Southern California climate, and working part-time jobs to pay my way. I happened to hear about a short-term job at a local software startup. They were looking for students in the Computer Science program, and promised that no experience was necessary.

The project was creating FORTRAN overlays for a massive scientific software application. *Overlays* was a technique of breaking code into smaller routines that could run standalone in the limited memory available in a DEC PDP-11 computer. It required some knowledge of coding, decent logic, and good attention to detail. I was delighted. Here I was, still a student, working with top engineers and researchers in the field of digital signal processing. My boss was the Vice President (VP) of Engineering. He was only too happy to give me more tasks when I completed the initial project in less than half of the allocated time.

Your brand is your area of specialty (skills, tools, domain knowledge) plus your qualities and aptitudes that together identify you within a competitive industry.

The systems guy, a massive, bearded giant with fingers like sausages, quickly realized that I could fit into spaces that were way too small for him (or anyone else on his team). Soon, he was borrowing me from Engineering so that I could pull cable through the ceiling crawl space or climb inside a VAX to retrieve a dropped part. It was like a geek Disneyland, and I was being paid much more than I made working in a frozen yogurt shop!

When the VP of Engineering discovered that I could write, he gratefully dumped all of the product documentation on me. At this point, I had never heard of technical communication, and had certainly never considered it as a possible career.

But I wrote. I learned how to use Troff (an early markup language) to format content. I edited. I played with the software to try to figure things out. I created. And I was hooked.

Upon graduation the next year, I was invited to start full-time at the company, still reporting to the VP of Engineering, but primarily in a documentation role. I accepted, got serious about this new profession, and began learning in earnest.

All of this (by way of my origins story) leads to these insights:

- I was phenomenally lucky to accidentally stumble upon a profession that suits me. I can take no credit at all for this good fortune.
- Our profession and the job market were wildly different in 1980, and I was lucky to be starting my career when it was significantly easier to break into the field. Again, this was through no merit on my part, but just the luck of being in the right place at the right time.
- I was blessed with many mentors during those first years; some were patient, some were prickly, and some were reluctant. But I learned from all of them. I took full advantage to learn from everyone. I built up rapport with some of the notoriously "difficult" subject matter experts (SMEs) and set aside my own ego to absorb as much knowledge as possible.
- That first year of intensive self-study started a career-long love for professional development. To this day, even as I near the end of my career, I push myself to continue learning in our field.
- Some of the courses and workshops that I took made me realize that I could blend my technical knowledge, academic data, and my public speaking skills into opportunities as a trainer. This involved taking risks as I began developing myself as a presenter in the field, but was definitely a successful outcome to some lateral thinking!

Finding My Feet

For the first five years, I was busy learning and gaining experience. I left my first job and went to work for another small software company in the area. I was too busy trying to drink from the firehose of information to worry about what *kind* of TechComm professional I wanted to be. There was always too much to do and so much to learn.

It was that metaphorical firehose that exposed me to so many different tasks, roles, technologies, and new experiences. For example, the SMEs felt comfortable asking for my help, so I became the UI text editor. I helped SMEs to get papers published and managers to get conference proposals accepted. I was asked to participate in cross-departmental committees. I was eventually asked to build a department and manage a team. I trained. I worked on the company's first ever branding guide and style guide. I was inducted into the mysteries of the Telex machine. I navigated excruciating cultural and communication barriers with the team in Japan. I used a light table to make cut-and-paste layout. I conducted usability tests. I represented the company at trade shows. How many newbie TechComm practitioners get to do all of that these days?

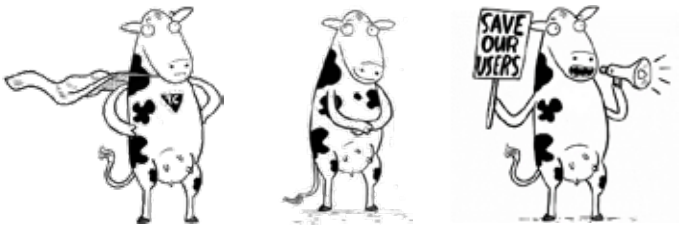
These varied experiences provided me with enough raw data to eventually identify my strengths and weaknesses, as well as my preference. (You can be good at something but not necessarily enjoy it!) By the end of my first decade in the profession, I had developed a clear idea of my personal brand in TechComm:

- I liked to write and edit and was reasonably good at both.
- I was an effective and successful trainer, especially involving aspects of clear writing and key concepts in TechComm theory and practice, and I enjoyed it very much.
- As much as I loved training, I utterly detested teaching tools (DTP, graphics applications, etc.). I lacked the patience or aptitude. Tools, an absolute necessity of the job, bored me. Repeatedly, I watched people who were not professional or dynamic speakers do a far superior job of teaching tools. I learned to decline all such requests!
- I wrote shockingly bad Marcom content. I've had many clients over the years ask me to work on their material, as I know the product and the technology. But I found myself unable to doff my TechComm voice (short, simple imperatives and logical structure) to write compelling copy. Instead, I developed good connections with talented Marcom writers, and am happy to make referrals for my clients.
- I was a conscientious but unhappy manager. My first management position was a huge leap forward in my career path. But although it was a big bump in salary, responsibility, and perks, it made me miserable.
- Office politics made me itch. The higher I went as an employee, the more time I spent navigating egos and personal agendas. I was not great at it and it left me feeling utterly exhausted.

- I was a right-brain thinker, but managed to develop good left-brain skills (visual, design, etc.).

With a clearer understanding of where I fit into the TechComm landscape, I ultimately had the courage to break out on my own as a trainer and consultant.

Developing the Cow TC cow mascot was an extension of my personal brand: my sense of humor is on display. Anyone who has taken any of my courses has experienced the cow in her many forms (and often accompanied by some of her barnyard friends).



Getting Started

If you are near the beginning of your TechComm career and you haven't yet fully identified your brand, here are some tips that can help you begin the journey of discovery:

Skills: Take a quick inventory of your skills; that is, specific things that you know how to *do*. For example, using certain tools, writing task-based content, creating flowcharts, etc.

Aptitudes: Next, consider general areas of things that you are good at. Rather than a specific action, this is more like a good ear for music, or the ability to mediate conflict in a meeting.

Likes and Dislikes: When are you happiest at work? When do you feel like you are in the zone, chugging along contentedly, oblivious of passing time? And on the flip side, what makes you feel stressed and miserable? Do not confuse this with a fear of something that is outside your comfort zone. For example, if you lack experience with a particular tool, don't count that as a dislike. However, if you have ample experience with something and intensely dislike doing it, make a note of that. Consider things like whether you like to work alone or with a team, whether you like to be a specialist or a generalist, and how much structure you like.

External Perception: How we see ourselves is not necessarily how others see us. It can be very helpful to understand how others see you when you are trying to identify your authentic brand. For example, a colleague of mine loved playing guitar and writing fiction, which don't really translate into a TechComm brand. He was sure that he could become a very creative Marcom writer, but other people's view of him sent him on a different path. It turned out that he was incredibly patient in explaining how to work with graphics. Because of that, he was repeatedly asked to help train other people, and he became closely linked with "graphics" in everyone's perception of him. As this was also an in-demand market niche, he allowed other's perception to help shape his brand, and successfully (and profitably) marketed himself as a graphics trainer for many years.

How we see ourselves is not necessarily how others see us. It can be very helpful to understand how others see you when you are trying to identify your authentic brand.

Consider this a private exercise; no one needs to read your notes or peek inside your head. Therefore, be brutally honest with yourself. Only when you have an honest understanding of yourself can you move forward.

Once you have a clear idea of who you are (and who others think you are), take a realistic assessment of your environment. What is in demand in your area? Is

there a glut of people with your skillset? Can you take advantage of a skill and aptitude to fill a much-needed niche? Or do you have the flexibility to relocate to find the ideal match between your desired brand and a job opportunity? The reality is that not everyone can instantly leverage their natural brand into the ideal job in their current job market.

Reassessing

For those of you with many years and much experience in the profession, consider doing a branding refresh exercise. You can take the same inventory of skills, aptitudes, likes and dislikes, and external perception as explained previously. There are a few reasons to reassess every decade:

You Change: Change is natural and healthy. You don't necessarily like the same music you listened to in your 20s or wear the same hair style. Something that suited you 10 or 15 years ago may not suit you now.

The Profession Changes: We are going through a massive earthquake of change right now, between AI, IoT, and general global and economic uncertainty. Things that you successfully pushed as your brand may no longer attract new clients. Be honest with yourself: how willing are you to let go of old skills and retrain/rethink for today's environment?

Beyond Skills: a few last tips

The exercise of self-assessment is often uncomfortable, but it is a necessary step in taking action to direct your career. Keep these in mind:

Quality Counts: When you consider how your clients (or your current employer) see you, think about what *qualities* they would most strongly identify with you. These are often the vague, squishy attributes that are impossible to quantify, such as competence, honesty, friendliness, flexibility, or intensity. If others see you in a way that you do not like, are you willing to invest the time and effort to work on those nebulous aspects of personality? Ultimately, the brand of "Index Queen" will only be successful if your clients also perceive you as competent, professional, and easy to work with.

You Are Allowed to Change: As discussed in *Reassessing*, change is normal and your right. You are allowed to change your mind about what you want to emphasize in your branding. Never feel trapped into being "The Graphics Guy" or "Flowchart Fabio" if you are developing new skills and interests.

You Are Allowed to Have Multiple Brands: As a self-employed trainer/consultant, I have different clients who have very different concepts of who or what I am. As long as those are legitimate aspects of who I am and what I do, I don't try to steer the client towards one brand. I've learned to listen and discover what they want (and how they got to me). Some clients know me only through my conference presentations and workshops; others know me only as an in-house consultant. Give yourself some flexibility and wiggle room to accept work that isn't necessarily your main brand.

I would love to hear about your journey to discover your personal, authentic TechComm brand! ■

LEAH GUREN is the owner/operator of Cow TC. She has been active in the field of technical communication since 1980 and now devotes her time to training and consulting. Leah works with technical communication teams all over the world, using humor and a lively interactive training approach to help them solve their biggest content development challenges. She also provides consulting services to companies, emphasizing documentation UX and creating global-ready content. Leah's clients include some of the top high-tech and biotech companies, including Intel, IBM, Microsoft, Johnson & Johnson, RAD, Cisco, Medtronic, and Rambam Medical Center. Leah is popular speaker in the field of technical communication, a published author, and one of the leading instructors in the field. She has helped hundreds of new practitioners enter the field of technical communication and trained further thousands through her presentations and workshops at internation conferences. Leah is a Fellow in STC (Society for Technical Communication) and a founding member of *tekom Israel*.

Supporting a Software Sales and Retention Pipeline: Opportunities and Challenges

By Mackenzie Myers Fowler
and Michael Opsteegh | Fellow

Whether your content supports marketing, technical publication, or other purposes, it's essential to write with one voice that communicates a successful brand to your users.

In many ways marketing and technical publications (tech pubs) teams are closely related. Both teams compose text and graphics to communicate about products. Both teams may develop video content to support their goals. Both teams may use personas to contemplate the needs of their audiences. It may seem the similarities end there. Marketing's budget is typically more flush than that of a tech pubs team. Marketing works more closely with sales, while tech pubs works more closely with development. Marketing's goal is to support product sales, and tech pub's goal is to help users solve problems and continue using the product.

What if marketing focused a bit more on retaining existing customers? And what if tech pubs focused a bit more on attracting new customers? That's what we do at our company.

We work for a software company that develops solutions within the eyecare industry. Eyecare is an unusual space because it rests at the intersections of healthcare, retail, and fashion, which means our customers approach our products—and our content—with a variety of goals, prior experiences, and needs. To complicate the situation further, our products are used by small businesses and large enterprises, each with dynamic needs in a continuously shifting regulatory environment.

Although marketing and tech pubs are now part of separate organizational units, our tech pubs team has reported through marketing at various points in the company's history. Suffice to say, we have a close, collaborative relationship with each other.

This article outlines the various ways our marketing and tech pubs teams work hand in glove to support our sales and retention pipeline in a niche B2B software space.

Arming Sales with Training Videos

Recently, our tech pubs team conducted stakeholder interviews with teams throughout the company, including sales and marketing. Through these interviews we learned a lot about how our internal users experience technical content and why they seek technical content to begin with.

Although the sales team sees our training videos primarily as a retention tool, they do send videos to potential customers who are too shy to commit to a one-on-one demo. This enables the potential buyer to see how the software works without feeling like they're going to be pressured by a sales pitch. And since customers are busy people, the short training videos are just the right length to engage their attention. The sales team doesn't mind sharing the videos because they create interest in the potential customer and provide a platform for follow-up questions.

Knowing that potential users are an audience for our training videos, we keep them in mind as we decide how detailed we need to make new videos. We're also creating playlists for sales that include overview videos that would be appropriate for our soon-to-be users.

Leveraging Technical Changes to Engage Customers

The marketing team is continuously engaging our customers through social media, email, and in-product messaging. Sometimes, the messages are promotional, but very often they are informational. These informational messages may relate to such hot seasonal subjects as running year-end reports, breaking down upcoming regulatory changes, and getting ready for back-to-school season.

While the call to action within a promotional email might take readers to a blog post or web form, these informational communications usually take readers to a help topic or training video in which the reader can learn more about the subject. This helps foster trust between our company and existing users by showing them we are a dependable source of information and can anticipate their needs. At its most developed, this sense of trust evolves into brand loyalty.

Making the Technical Content Social Friendly

The tech pubs team wants to encourage marketing to continue to drive users to our technical content. One of

the ways tech pubs can encourage sharing content is by reinforcing the brand identity marketing has established.

> **One of the ways tech pubs can encourage sharing content is by reinforcing the brand identity marketing has established.**

When marketing informs tech pubs that they want to share a piece of content, the tech pubs team adds "Open Graph" information to the target help topic. Open Graph is a protocol that takes an ordinary URL and turns it into an eye-catching post when it is shared on such social media platforms as LinkedIn, Facebook, and X. Open Graph enables us to specify a large image, custom page title, and descriptive preview text, all of which are more engaging than the content the social media platforms pull from the page on their own.

Due to the nature of Open Graph, this metadata must be added to each help topic individually, so we have to be judicious about which topics we enhance with Open Graph. Tech pubs works with marketing to understand which topics will be featured in the coming weeks so we can be prepared to support marketing's efforts.

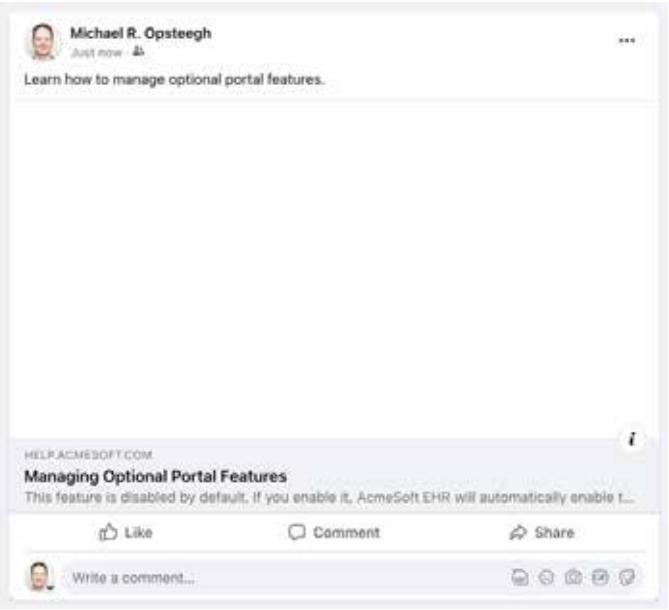


Figure 1 A Facebook post that references a help topic without Open Graph metadata. Notice the empty space where an image should be and the bland, unappealing text pulled directly from the page.

Michael R. Opsteegh
Just now
See how the patient portal can streamline your practice and help your patients engage more with their health outcomes.
HELP.ACMESOFT.COM
Activating Patient Portals - AcmeSoft EHR
Meet regulatory requirements and empower your patients to take a more active role in their...
Like
Comment
Share
Write a comment...

Figure 2 A Facebook post that references a help topic with Open Graph metadata. Notice the large image that doesn't actually appear within the help topic, and the more descriptive title and preview text.

By supporting the brand identity, the tech pubs team makes it easier for marketing to share technical content.

Sharing Knowledge Internally

The marketing and tech pubs teams have naturally developed a symbiotic relationship. While members of our teams tend to have similar backgrounds (e.g., bachelor's or master's degrees in English, journalism or communication) our professional emphases have naturally led us to become experts in different areas that complement each other.

Marketing interacts with various groups across the enterprise and has a well-developed sense of the company's goals and directions. Marketing's broad, big-picture view of competing priorities across the company provides knowledge that the tech pubs team can tap into. For example, if a conversation between marketing, sales, and operations uncovers a missed revenue opportunity within a software feature, it's helpful for the tech pubs team to know about it. From there, tech pubs can develop documentation that supports marketing's promotion of the feature, which ultimately informs customers, drives sales, and upholds business objectives.

Meanwhile, the tech pubs team works closely with the software developers and product owners to develop a deep understanding of the functionality and technology. The tech pubs team has developed a subject-matter expertise that marketing can leverage. To ensure knowledge circulates between the teams and to give members the opportunity to see what the other team is working on, we hold biweekly knowledge management meetings. These meetings are a forum for talking through communication challenges, raising urgent or emergent issues, and exploring opportunities to collaborate further.

Creating a Feedback Loop

Both the marketing and the tech pubs teams have established review cycles for their content. Marketing includes tech pubs, not only to keep tech pubs in the loop, but also to rely on their subject matter expertise. The tech pubs team includes marketing in reviews for visibility, but also to tap into marketing's talent for developing benefit statements for new features and making connections with initiatives across far-flung groups within the company.

Writing with One Voice

Though marketing and tech pubs teams may at times prioritize different business goals and hold nuanced perspectives, we are always united on at least one front beyond supporting the enterprise: supporting the audience as a knowledgeable but approachable resource. This is the end goal of any piece of communication we send out, whether it's a customer-facing Facebook post or an internal training video.

As to be expected, marketing sometimes speaks to customers and prospects with a more promotional voice, while tech pubs prioritizes clarity and concision. Different scenarios call for slight variations in tone. But at the end of the day, we want our customers to trust what we have to say, come to us with questions, and continue to build on the relationship both teams work so diligently to create with them.

This can demand a cross in each team's typical approach or perspective. Sometimes, a piece of marketing communications might call for writing that stresses technical clarity over creativity. Other times, a piece of documentation may call for a friendlier tone than one might expect in technical writing. This effort is worthwhile, as it supports our brand's voice, of course, but also forges deeper connections—not only with our audiences, but within our own company.

> **"This effort is more than worth it, as it supports our brand's voice, of course, but also forges deeper connections—not only with our audiences, but within our own company.**

Conclusion

These are just some of the ways our teams work in tandem to support customer retention and acquisition. In fact, we work so closely together that sometimes our internal users misdirect requests for marketing materials to tech pubs and requests for technical information to marketing. We take this as a good sign that we're working well together. ■

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Strategies for Interviewing Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

By Nicky Bleiel | Fellow

Interviewing Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) is an important part of the knowledge gathering process when writing software documentation.

Through research and testing, we can learn a great deal on our own about new features. But sometimes that isn't enough to get the answers we need." Enter the SME. A SME interview is a three-step process – preparing, conducting, and following up. These steps are the same for both synchronous one-on-one interviews and asynchronous question and answer volleys in issue tracking tickets or messaging apps.

Preparing for a SME Interview

Before the interview process begins, prepare your SME by sharing the information they need, such as your project plan and deadlines, final deliverable(s), and other useful details. And remember that some SMEs may need to be told what their responsibilities are – some honestly don't know and may be nervous about being first time SMEs. While being an SME is not their primary job responsibility, most SMEs know how important their contribution is to the success of the product. (If they don't, remind them.) Always share the review process, because SME responsibilities don't end with the interview, they include review and approval.

While being a SME is not their primary job responsibility, most SMEs know how important their contribution is to the success of the product is. (If they don't, remind them.)

Identifying SMEs

First of all, it's important to learn who the SMEs are and cultivate relationships with them. Often a SME will be assigned to you — and you should work with that person — but expanding your cohort of SMEs will often improve the final product, and make it easier to get quick answers to your questions in the future. SMEs are everywhere, and like a good journalist, you need to cultivate them as sources. Potential SMEs include (but are not limited to): software developers, business analysts, quality assurance testers, technical support, product managers, sales professionals, and even customers (though this can be a little challenging to arrange).

Expanding Your Cohort of SMEs

These suggestions are a mix of short-term and long-term efforts.

- During a SME interview, always ask "Who might have more information?" (And if there is additional information published internally – the author could be another resource).
- Volunteer to explain Information Development responsibilities (which include interviewing SMEs) at new hire orientation (it may be a while before those new hires are SMEs, but existing SMEs usually attend orientation).
- Schedule meetings with other teams (such as QA and Customer Support) to explain what the information development team is working on and let them know you are available to answer questions.
- Post to the company messaging channels with Information Development team updates.

Preparing Interview Questions

The next thing you need to do is prepare your questions. Start by reading project documents (such as issue tracking tickets, user stories, design artifacts, and testing the software). Take notes while you are researching. Your notes will come in handy when writing questions, and if your SME asks why you are asking the question – as well as for your reference later when writing.

When writing questions, keep in mind one of the tenets of journalism: the 5 Ws and one H questions (Who, What, Why, Where, When, How). For example:

- **Who would use this feature?** You know your audience but you will gain insight into who the SME thinks the audience is for this content.
- **What are the prerequisites?** What are the *feature* prerequisites – is there anything users need to configure before using the feature? (Not the software version, operating system, etc. Those should be in the project documents.)

- **When would users use this feature?** When **shouldn't** they use it?
- **Why should they use this feature?** This is often conceptual information – the use case.
- **How** and the **Where** combine to explain the task. You may already know this because you have tested the software, but work through the steps together.

> **Write open-ended questions to avoid yes/no answers. And, since we are their representative, always consider the user perspective.**

Write open-ended questions to avoid yes/no answers. And, since we are their representative, always consider the user perspective — what would they ask about the feature? What task would they be trying to accomplish? How will it make their job easier? If the interface has major changes, would it help the user if there was a chart explaining how to accomplish tasks in the old interface versus the new?

After you have all your questions written, your SME prepped, and the interview scheduled, you need to take the time to get your questions in order before the interview. The flow of questions is very important – the interview will go more smoothly if you aren't jumping around from topic to topic. This step is especially useful if you promised to send the questions in advance.

Conducting One-on-One Interviews

As soon as you sit down (whether live or virtually), acknowledge their expertise. Share yours. People have different styles – brusque versus talkative; formal versus informal. Adjust to their style. Don't be intimidated – the interview should be a dialog; not a monologue. If their body language is closed off (a little harder to determine virtually, but at the start, ask them to please turn on their cameras), take a minute to make them more comfortable.

In order to keep the interview on track, ask the SME to take you down the "happy path" (the best-case scenario) for the feature first, followed by the exceptions. Many SMEs want to share the potential issues first, which is understandable, but this method will help you get answers faster (then you can dig into the issues if there is time).

There is one question you should always ask SMEs – what I call *the magic question* – "How do **you think** this feature will help the user?" It helps everyone to level-set on the goals, objectives, and thought process behind the feature. It's very clarifying for everyone.

During the interview, really listen to their answers – does the SME reveal paths you hadn't considered? Or a use case you didn't know about? Follow up on all your questions during the interview – don't assume another chance. One trick to confirm an answer is summarize their statements back to them – "What I hear you saying is..."

Encourage whiteboarding and take pictures for your records. Stick to the planned meeting time as it shows respect for their time.

If the SME can't confirm a fact, ask them if they know who or what can (you might find a new SME to add to the cohort).

Asynchronous Interviews

It's a reality that there are some SMEs you will never get one-on-one time with, or there are so many SMEs on a project that you can't set up an interview with all of them. In that case, you need to get your questions answered in other ways. You can use a combination of issue tracking tickets, messaging apps, wikis, and other remote collaboration tools. Questions answered outside of the issue tracking ticket should be retained in some way. Save emails as PDFs and attach them to the ticket. Link to messaging app conversations (or screen capture them) and attach those as well.

The questions you need to ask won't vary too much between one-on-one and asynchronous interviews, but there are some things to keep in mind:

- Write succinct, clear questions.
- Avoid asking questions that have already been answered elsewhere (such as a comment in the ticket or other document).
- Include links to related issues/information so the SME knows you've seen that information and it doesn't answer your question (if you don't, you might get those very same links back as answers).
- Be specific! Add screen caps if they will make your question clearer.
- Long lists of questions can be overwhelming – try to avoid that if you can.
- As always, ask who might have more information, or where you could find it.

What If?

Sometimes you can't get the answers you need. One suggestion to work around that issue — write what you can with the information you have, then post it to your internal wiki or in the issue tracking ticket. Point stakeholders to this content and diplomatically share your process. Include the SME (or SMEs) in all messages. This can help identify other possible SMEs or kick-start the process.

Following Up and Post Release

The interview is over. Now we need to handle the follow-up, which is a quick but important task. First, thank the SME via email or messaging app, and copy their manager (this verifies to the manager that the SME participated in the interview). In the message, make sure to mention that you look forward to working with the SME on the next phases of the project. This reminds everyone that we aren't quite done yet (since there are additional steps in the process that they are responsible for). The next phase will, of course, be writing. Followed by review and approval by SMEs.

Celebrate the release with your entire team. And if you uncover any previously unknown information during your SME interviews, add that content to your company knowledgebase/wiki and publicize it. ■

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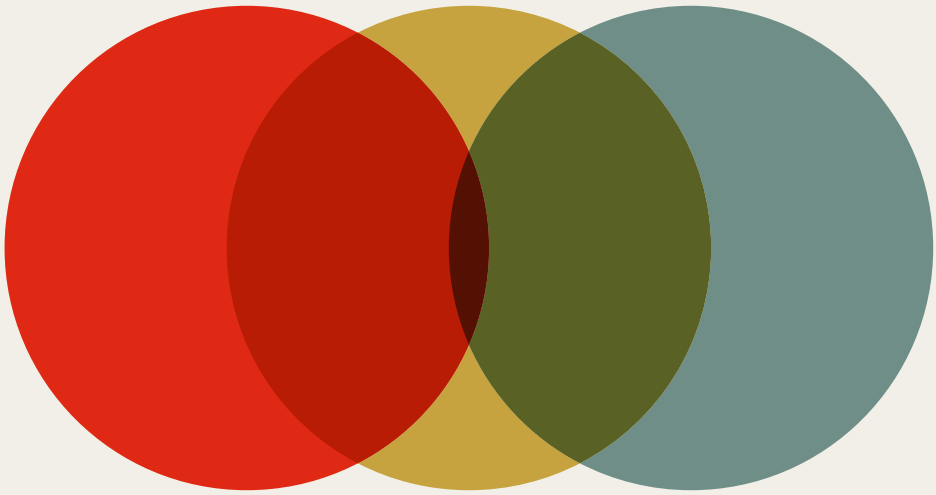
Succinctness and Relatability: The Technical Editor's New Groove

By Jeremy Streich

Change is an endless, unavoidable, imperturbable beast. In all sectors, spheres, and climates, it takes more energy to *resist* change than to allow it. Media is much the same.



In recent years, we have seen myriad ways in which the consumption, production, and dissemination of news, stories, and information have taken on new shapes and forms. In such a world, editors and publishers were giants, gatekeepers of modern equivalency to companies like Apple, Google, Microsoft, Meta, and TikTok. The editors not only changed text; they chose what text mattered and what came to flow across the public eye. Consumers received what editors and publishers agreed upon, and in what order their consumption would occur. The story of an editor today, however, follows quite a different form—not that of the gatekeeper but rather, the interpreter.

To trace the rise and fall of journalism—and the written word more broadly—is beyond the current scope of argument. However, what's not outside our bounds, is the way in which the role of the editor has changed in recent years, and how a focus on two crucial concepts—namely clarity and succinctness—can enable an editor to fully embody their newfound role as interpreter.

First, it's important to diagnose how the landscape has changed. Today, due to the Internet and its subsequent devices, people can choose what kinds of information they want to receive, when they receive it, and how it is transmitted (Brooks and Pinson 2017). Thus, as Brooks and Pinson suggest in *The Art of Editing in the Age of Convergence*, the skillset needed for success as an editor of journalism has changed significantly—namely skills in audio editing, video editing, and web production—because users now have almost unlimited access to an effectively endless digital database of traditional and non-traditional types of media and information. "In this more egalitarian environment the one-to-many [gatekeeper] model disappears, and the user takes control" (Brooks and Pinson *2017*). It is, nonetheless, important to note that, by way of clever user-experience and applied psychology, users are made to *feel* that they have total control, while the reality is that a complex suite of software tools, and by extension their parent companies, have a forceful fingerprint on what information a user receives. Put more succinctly, companies like Meta now man the gate, and editors have a new role within, where social media feeds are no less than essential.

Succinctness: The Modern Editor's New Groove

In a 2014 study at Virginia Commonwealth University, a trio of researchers observed, using video cameras and eye trackers, a variety of college students during a three-hour study session. They found that, on average, each student spent more than an hour listening to music and allowed *thirty-five* interruptions of six seconds or longer, totaling *twenty-six disrupted minutes*. In other words, a student was distracted for almost 17% of the study session (Calderwood 2014). This study shows that, because of the ease of access the Internet provides, modern people struggle to stay on task; there is always something interesting at the other end of the hyperlink. But the problem does not end at seventeen percent.

Attention switching has residual effects. When you switch tasks, writes one Georgetown professor, author, and software engineer in his book *Deep Work,* "a residue of your attention remains stuck thinking about the previous task," and the residue is especially "thick" if you were never focused in the first place (Newport 2016). Thus, the students of the aforementioned study were likely effective for only a few minutes across that entire three hour span—if at all.

Crucially, attention, context, and/or task switching release neurochemicals associated with pleasure, joy, and comfort (Becker 2019). In the groundbreaking book, *The Distracted Mind*, Adam Gazzaley, a renowned neuroscientist from the University of California San Francisco, writes "Humans seem to exhibit an innate drive to forage for information in much the same way that other animals are driven to forage for food, we need to consider how this 'hunger' is now fed to an extreme degree by modern technological advances that deliver highly accessible information" (Gazzaley 2016). So when a media service shows a user one article, then advertises another with a pop-up, and another in a commercial break, and another in a scroll-over video, and so on, the user is driven by mechanisms that are fundamental to the human experience. And media providers make their money by keeping a user on platform (and viewing ads) for as long as possible; thus, they are incentivized to make a user feel as "happy" as possible—and the surest way to that is a long line of distracting, consumable content.

Once Gatekeeper, Now Interpreter

Generalizing, the best interpreters do not simply transcode English phonemes to their Spanish equivalents, or Korean to French, or any other pair of languages. They translate *ideas.* They act as the conduit from the origin of an idea—a public speaker for example, or the title of a novel—to the idea's recipient. There's a reason that *Star Wars* translates more directly to *War of the Stars* and *War of the Galaxies* in French and English respectfully. A translator made executive decisions to better capture the idea of the title rather than exact words. Herein lies the domain of the modern technical editor (Open.edu 2020). Sometimes editors, like interpreters, can solve significant problems during the transmittal of information. Namely, in this distracted informational ecosystem, the modern editor can ensure content is compelling enough for a reader to stick around, rather than leave to *forage* from a new source of mental *nourishment*. And there are two ways a modern editor can do so.

> **The best interpreters do not simply transcode English phonemes to their Spanish equivalents, or Korean to French or any other pair of languages. They translate ideas.**

Succinctness is best defined as clarity without loss of meaning, and in the modern world, it's often the ultimate goal of effective editing. "Good writing doesn't just happen," and in the modern world of fast paced, abundant, ubiquitous information sharing, "less is often more: the economical phrase, the lean sentence, the stark image. Such writing grabs readers and stays with them" (Stoughton 1989, 141). One might argue that my claim—succinctness as key ingredient to a successful piece of content—is nothing new. Flowery language, jargon, and sloppy thinking have always been off-putting for readers. Writers have always written to be understood, "whether they are writing to inform, amuse, uplift, persuade, or cajole, their thoughts must be clear" (Kessler and McDonald 2012). All of these points are true; succinctness—clarity plus conciseness— have always been important. But have they ever been *as* important?

Because the majority of twenty first century information consumption happens on devices connected to the Internet, technical editors must be sharper, more economical, and more clever than ever. Often, users of social and mobile media, and in particular younger ones, act more like an online community than individual consumers of a product (Brooks and Pinson 2017, 345). What this means is twofold: the importance of placement and organization in a text, and the use of relatable and *intimate* language. Interest, among online readers, generally persists if they feel like they *belong* to the group for whom the content was written. Herein lies the second tool in a modern technical editor's toolbox

An editor must be clever with placement, and perhaps more importantly, relatability. Though perhaps more important now because of dwindling attention spans, a modern editor can often achieve this with techniques such as placing "the best material near the top of the page, break up the type with block quotes, subheads and bulleted lists, limit the amount of scrolling a reader has to do by using internal links," and more (Brooks and Pinson 2017, 345). What's different today is, perhaps, a result of the immediacy of information exchange,

As a way to thank you, we want to show you all the amazing things we were able to build because of your invention.
K let's see whatchya got.
Alright, first let's take Bok on a plane, and into a submarine, and to the top of the Burj Khalifa. Now we'll show him a telescope and a TV and an iPhone. And now we'll let him play around on the internet for a while.
Okay that was fun. How'd it go, Bok?

From an article in "Wait But Why" by Tim Urban, one of the most popular blogs on the internet (Urban 2020).

namely email and messaging. Previously, slang and abbreviations were "used sparingly; they are a shorthand form of writing and therefore *informal*" (Judd 1982, 154). Even well-known and understood Latin abbreviations like e.g., i.e., etc., viz., AM/PM, BCE, and AD (which stand for, respectively, for example, that is, and so forth, namely, ante meridiem/post meridiem, Before Common Era, Anno Domini) were not often seen in traditional journals and newspapers (154). Today, however, their use is quite different.

> **An editor must be clever with placement and, perhaps more importantly, relatability.**

Because young readers seek succinctness and relatability, they want to see emojis, acronyms, memes, and other familiar terminology—e.g.: LOL, IRL, POV. These 'phrases' are *shorter*, *clearer*, and *more relatable,* which is the fundamental task of today's technical editors. As Stoughton, the author of *Substance and Style,* presciently explains, each consumer "has its favorite words, its particular vocabulary, and its sacred cows." You can edit the slang, acronyms, and neologisms, the author continues, "but if there is the slightest ambiguity or doubt, leave the words alone." (Stoughton 1989, 173). To the modern reader, an acronym like POV is not only ten letters shorter, but also a flicker of familiarity, resulting in a positive release in a brain's neuroendocrine system.

Finding the Intentional High Ground

Change by way of technology is an inescapable and unrelenting force, and in every industry, sphere, and environment, resisting the march of progress generally requires more energy than it's worth. This is particularly relevant in the media landscape where the dissemination of news, stories, and information has dramatically changed. Where editors and publishers once stood as colossal gatekeepers, editors are now more like clever interpreters, tasked with not just improving grammar, but maintaining attention, helping readers make sense of the vast flow of information. As I think on these recent changes, it's apparent that media has, and will continue to, evolve in parallel to the unyielding pace of change. Currently, the attentional high ground in this evolutionary step is none other than succinctness and relatability. ■

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President's Letter

BY LIZ HERMAN, PHD | *STC President*

Writing about the past for a future issue of *Intercom*, this issue, is an interesting writing dynamic, but one I look forward to acclimating to over the course of my year as Board President. It's as if I'm starring in my own version of *Back to the Future.* I am just back from STC's Summit and would like to share my reflections with you—many pulled directly from conversations held with those in Minneapolis in May.

Greeting current and prospective members is always a highlight. The opportunities for both formal and informal networking were numerous. Ninety-one attendees were at Summit for the first time! It is important that STC turn first-time attendees into multiple-time attendees while also providing a program that is attractive to its long-time attendees.

Attendees appreciated the conference layout, where both sessions, ceremonies, and food stations were near each other. There were great reviews about the food included in the registration cost (breakfast, lunch, afternoon snacks, and dinner-sized evening hors d'oeuvres). Meeting our attendees' dietary needs is a continued area of focus for our conference planners and selected venues, as is accessibility.

Thanks to a variety of programming, attendees had multiple sessions from which to choose with the schedule embedded in the conference app. Reducing overlap, publicizing start and end times, and arranging ample time to transition between sessions will be addressed.

The new Annual Business Meeting (ABM) format allowed us to look back at the accomplishments of the past year, share STC's current financial position, introduce STC's 2024-2025 Board of Directors and Nominating Committee members, and share the areas of focus for the future including a refreshed website and marketing strategy, better member pricing, bundled education offerings with certificates of completion, and providing additional community support. The ABM transcript is available on the STC website at http://www.stc.org.

Celebrating our honorees and awardees in two distinct events was a hit and we look forward to continuing that format next year. Congratulations again to all of those receiving accolades.

Thank you to conference co-chairs Kelly Schrank and Amanda Patterson whose work within an accelerated schedule was extraordinary. Thank you to our speakers, vendors, and exhibitors who also worked within a compressed timeline and ultimately delivered an outstanding program with support from the STC staff.

Although I write this less than 24 hours since I said goodbye to the 2024 Summit attendees, planning is already underway for next year. By the time you read this, our 2025 Summit dates and location should be announced with the call for proposals slated for the fall. Know that we value your feedback and will work to ensure continuous improvements to this keystone event. My goal is that STC becomes and continues to be your professional home and I can't wait to welcome you to the next Summit. See you in the future, but thank you for letting me go back in time. ■

LIZ HERMAN, PHD, is a knowledge management practitioner and is certified in project management and technical communication.

STC Honors and Award Recipients

STC recognizes excellence in technical communication and outstanding service to the Society with its honors, awards, and competitions programs.

- Individuals are honored for their contributions to the profession via speaking, teaching, mentoring, writing, and research, as well as their service and dedication to the Society and their communities.
- Communities are recognized for their contributions to the Society's goal of providing high-quality programming, resources, and networking opportunities for technical communicators all over the world.

Honors, awards, and recognitions are given at the Honors Event at the annual STC Summit, along with at the Leadership Program.

Honors and Awards

Excellence in Service to STC Award

Alyssa Fox

President's Award

Aiessa Moyna

Danielle Villegas

Fellows

Alisa Bonsignore

Jane Wilson

Michael Opsteegh

Cynthia Pao

Jay R. Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication

Dr. Sean Williams, *Arizona State University*

Connect with STC!

Find STC on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Slack to get the latest information on upcoming events, industry news, and to network with tech comm professionals!

Ken Rainey Award for Excellence in Research

Dr. Isidore Dorpenyo

Frank R. Smith Award for Outstanding Journal Article in *Technical Communication*

Alisa Bonsignore

Frank R. Smith Award for Distinguished Journal Article in *Technical Communication*

Lin Dong

Zhijun Gao

Sigma Tau Chi

Aracely Hernandez, *Michigan Technology University*

Liping Yang, *Georgia State University*

Intercom Award Outstanding Magazine Article

Christina Mayr

Intercom Award Outstanding Guest-Edited Issue

Jackie Damrau

Amanda Horton

STC Student Scholarship

Liping Yang, *Georgia State University*

Community Achievement Awards

Community of the Year Award

North Texas Lone Star

Most Improved Community Award

Rochester

Platinum Communities

Carolina Chapter
Chicago Chapter
Instructional Design & Learning SIG
Michigan Great Lakes Chapter
North Texas Lone Star Chapter
Ohio Chapter
Washington DC – Baltimore Chapter

Gold Community

Rochester Chapter

Silver Community

Technical Editing SIG

Bronze Community

South Central Texas Chapter

Pacesetters

Carolina Chapter
Chicago Chapter
Instructional Design & Learning SIG
North Texas Lone Star Chapter
Rochester Chapter

Distinguished Chapter Service Awards

North Texas Lone Star Chapter – Jennifer Prior-Schledorn
Chicago Chapter – Sian Mehl
East Tennessee Chapter – Russel Hirst
Michigan Great Lakes Chapter – Kylie Jacobsen
Arizona Chapter – Erika Konrad

Distinguished SIG Service Awards

Technical Editing SIG – Susan McGowan
Policies & Procedures SIG – Tricia Spayer
Instructional Design & Learning SIG – Ruth-Anne Klassen ■

Advancing Your Tech Comm Career Through Personal Branding

BY KEVIN MEGLIC | *Senior Member*

The Oxford dictionary defines Branding as the promotion of a particular product or company by means of advertising and distinctive design. The word brand comes from the Old Norse word *Brandr*, meaning to burn.

Branding first originated as far back as 2,700 BC, in order to identify the ownership of livestock. As this process developed, consumers found a continuous trust in quality to a particular "brand" and that is why we continue the practice in most organizations today.

Why is this important to you? Because creating your personal brand can create a potential bond between you and a future employer, customer, or colleague before you even meet. Hence the old saying "your reputation precedes you."

How do you create your personal branding?

After some online research, I liked founder of SlimplyBe, a personal branding agency, Jessica Zweig Fishers' method of creating your personal branding by using these 3 pillars:

- Know your audience
- Know your value
- Know your why.

By identifying your audience, you can determine the characteristics of your products or services and narrow down which of those you wish to highlight.

By knowing your value, you can begin to establish a business case for why your skills are needed in any organization. One of the ways you can determine your value is by combining your experience using the tools of your industry, your soft skills, and unique attributes that make you, *you*.

An important part in this process is to not directly compare yourself to any other individual. You can, however, use people in your field as a benchmark for success. But the truth is, we are all unique and our experiences give value to everything we can apply them to.

Knowing your why, which is what your motivations and passions are, will help you find your place in the organization and where you can be of most effective. This is very important because if you don't know why a particular organization needs your services, then they won't either. Ask yourself what you can do to help achieve goals in your industry.

Ways to improve your personal branding

I was recently talking to a colleague about a book they were thinking about writing, and where to start. My piece of advice was to gather stories relevant to the subject matter and write them down. After you have your stories, you can then categorize them into chapters and add your "filler". Writing a book can establish you as a subject matter expert and give you something to

promote. One of my friend's favorite things is to cite his own work in various articles and other publications.

Creating a website is another way to promote your personal brand. By creating a website, you will have a central repository of information about you. And the best part is that you can use your own structure to determine how that information is presented, which gives the viewer a deeper sense of your ability without any further form of communication.

As a recruiter, I was searching for an instructional designer. I found one and asked them for samples of their work. They gave me a website to visit, but the website was so poorly structured I decided not to submit them to the client. The next candidate I found also gave me a website to reference. However, in this case I was so blown away by their work that I immediately forwarded not only their resume but the website to the client as well. The moral of the story is if you are going to create a website to promote your personal branding, make sure that it represents who you are as a professional. Don't spend more time on the theme than you do on how well the information is presented.

Public Speaking is also a great way to promote your personal brand. By creating presentations based upon your experience and skill, you demonstrate not only your grasp of the subject matter but also how it can be applied to fixing a common problem saving an organization time, money, or both!

By increasing your presence in your industry, you stand out as a professional with unique skills and talents that will be an asset to potential customers or employers. ■

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TCBOK Time

BY DEANNE LEVANDER | *Fellow*

This column features topics relevant to STC's Technical Communication Body of Knowledge (TCBOK) project. A wealth of free content resources is available to you on a wide range of technical communication topics. Visit http://tcbok.org or select Body of Knowledge from the STC home page at http://www.stc.org. This feature focuses on how to use the TCBOK as one of the research tools you can use to improve the quality of your technical content and working projects.

What are Your Options?

A broad variety of writing tools are available for technical communicators. Do you still consult a dictionary, a style guide, or a thesaurus? Or are you more likely to try an online tool for results? Regardless of your preferences, the result is what counts in technical communication. Despite the Oxford English Dictionary being updated quarterly (*yeet*, anyone?), hard-copy dictionaries may soon become a thing of the past. For example, Merriam-Webster, Inc. produces a paperback version, but has far more users accessing its online version. The decline in demand for print dictionaries has led to the absence of updated dictionaries for sale in bookstores.

With the demise of these time-honored tools, we find ourselves looking for quality references and sources for our needs. We have become accustomed to a fast return of results when searching online. Enter the Technical Communication Body of Knowledge: content culled from practicing technical communicators, *Intercom* magazine, and other STC publications, previously edited and published. Content topics feature succinct definitions, descriptions, and examples on a wide range of subjects.

Understanding Our Users: A Comparative Analysis of the Techniques We Can Use
Most Accessible and Most Reliable Sources
Technical Support

Create or Curate?

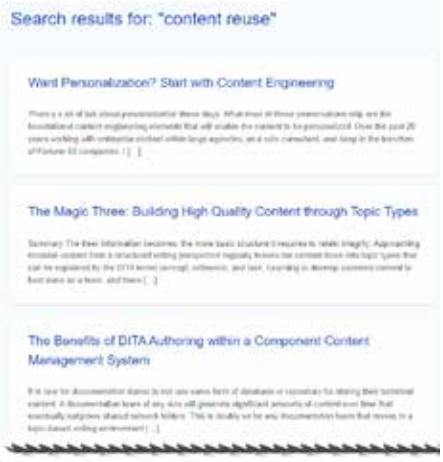
It is common to be asked to reuse what has already been created. Often, our task as technical communicators is to curate content from a variety of sources for a specific audience, and to reuse existing material and update it to reflect new features, processes, or regulations. For example, technical communicators in the highly regulated medical device industry must make use of materials that have already been approved by a notified body (for example, the FDA).

To illustrate how the TCBOK can be used to research the term *content reuse* or *content development tools*, consider the following extended example.

Begin with a Simple Keyword Search

Open the TCBOK (http://tcbok.org) and enter "content reuse" in the Google®-powered search box.

The search results bring up a broad range of topics related to content reuse.


Search results for: "content reuse"
Want Personalization? Start with Content Engineering
The Magic Three: Building High Quality Content through Topic Types
The Benefits of DITA Authoring within a Component Content Management System

Dig Deeper

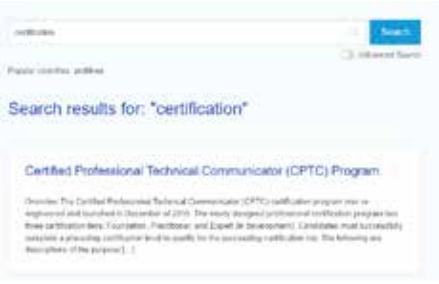
To further investigate, search for a related term, such as *content development*.

Why Can't We All Just Get Along? Wait! We Can! Better Understanding Content Marketing to Build Bridges and Wild Client Success

You'll find that the TCBOK includes content topics from peer-reviewed articles and well-edited material from other professional sources. Many content topics include reference lists that you might also find useful to expand your research for a particular topic.

Narrow Your Search to Accommodate Your Interest

As an example, search for the term *certification* and a broad range of related topics is at your fingertips.



The TCBOK team has been busy adding content that supports certification in addition to other salient topics. As technical communicators, the TCBOK team is adept at identifying useful topics to include in the TCBOK.

When exploring the topic, you might discover related terms to add to your list of research keywords. For example, you might use the following list of core competencies to aid your search for certification topics:

- Project Planning
- Project Analysis
- Content Development
- Organizational Design
- Written Communication
- Reviewing and Editing
- Visual Communication
- Content Management

Use STC's Salary Database

STC's *Salary Database* is the premier source of data for technical communication jobs nationwide.

Members, download your FREE copy at *https://www.stc.org/publications/salary-database/.*

- Production and Delivery.

Searching for the core competency term, *project planning*, returns a full-length article published in *Intercom* magazine.

Project Planning and Analysis

Laying the Groundwork: Project Planning and Project Analysis

Project Planning

Be efficient in how you search for content relevant to your interests. As the TCBOK becomes more mature and filled with relevant content, technical communicators will find more content to help them in their work or academic research.

Remember, the TCBOK is an Evolving Work in Progress

While the current TCBOK team has been adding new content from *Intercom* and editing existing TCBOK content, there remain gaps in the content, or material that needs more editing, or perhaps there is not enough solid content to help you achieve your immediate goals. As you explore articles and content topics, you may land on a page that obviously needs to be edited. This could be an opportunity to contribute suggestions or new content to a topic. A gentle email to the TCBOK team is all that is needed. Someone from the team will be happy to help out.

Consider using the TCBOK as a research tool. It is likely that you will find rich research material in addition to material needing more robust content. You are welcome to submit new content to the TCBOK, too. While supporting the TCBOK, you will be adding to your own professional portfolio! Do you have a recent term paper or blog that was well-received? Consider submitting it to a relevant topic area. Remember, however, that once content is published in the TCBOK, it falls under the *Creative Commons* license for publication and use.

Finally, use the TCBOK as a spring-board to your academic or project work. As content from *Intercom* and *Technical Communication* is added to the body of knowledge, the TCBOK will become more and more robust. Individual contributions may be edited, but remember, the articles from STC publications are already edited and need nothing further.

How TCBOK Content is Evaluated and Vetted

Any submissions to the TCBOK must be checked against the heuristics that have been set for the group.

Heuristics for content (we select 3 out of 5):

- It is timely or contributes to STC's history.
- It is relevant to the discipline of technical communication.
- It provides value to practitioners (for example, advance their knowledge) and academics (for example, it can contribute to a syllabus for a course in technical communication).
- It is original and not redundant TCBOK content.
- It aligns with one or more of the nine core competencies of professional certification.

Join Our Team!

We welcome new members! The TCBOK team has been busy, adding content and (at times) adjusting content that was already in the site. We are all volunteers, and the level of camaraderie and respect among members helps our cause. We technical writers know that it is very easy to not see problems in our own material (because we are too close to it), but it is very easy to see typos, grammatical errors, and more during our reviews of content that was added much earlier). ■

DEANNE LEVANDER is an STC Fellow whose STC history includes Society board member, TCBOK leader and volunteer, online and technical publication competition manager, chapter leader, student mentor, and SIG/COI leader. A tireless advocate for technical communication and technical communicators, she has been a technical writer in a broad range of industries including chemical manufacturing, food distribution, meteorology, agribusiness, life insurance, banking, and biomedical manufacturing. Deanne lives in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Remembering Antony Rhodes-Marriott

BY FRED O'HARA | *Member*

Antony Rhodes-Marriott was a longtime member and promoter of STC, was largely responsible for starting the Toronto and Winnipeg chapters, and contributed to the growth of STC by giving presentations at various conferences. Over the decades, he served in many positions at the local and international levels of STC. He was awarded Associate Fellow in 1991 and Fellow in 1994. Tony was also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA, 1975). Asked how he came upon his talents in communication, he said: "My parents added to my toolkit: my father a photographer and sometimes writer, and my mother a teacher, lecturer and writer. I worked with them, and their skills rubbed off on me."

Tony was born in Stockport, England, August 16, 1938, at which time his father was serving in the Royal Air Force (RAF) in northwest Scotland. As a result of his father's military service, Tony moved a lot in his first 11 years of life, living both in the wilds and in urban settings. He adapted to new and very different schools, made new friends easily, and forged lifelong friendships. As a teenager, he was an ardent cyclist and rode his bicycle to work daily. He was adventurous, and his love of wheels transferred into a lifetime enjoyment of Formula 1 racing and Tour de France bicycling. He even took a bicycle ride for his 82nd birthday!

Upon finishing school, he had an apprenticeship from Ferranti Limited, which provided him a great grounding in electronics and mechanics, building the Bloodhound surface-to-air missile. He got to use all the shop tools, and he always considered it four years well spent. He was eventually conscripted into the RAF, where he wound up using some of the equipment he had installed while apprenticed at Ferranti.

On mustering out, he found a job with Massey-Fergusson, and he and Mary married in Stockport, England, on his parents' silver wedding anniversary. After a while, his coworkers talked of emigrating. Tony considered the possibility, and in 1966, at the toss of a coin (heads Canada, tails Australia), he, Mary, and baby Alison emigrated to Canada. The impetus came when he found that their daughter Alison could cross the Atlantic by ship for seven pounds Sterling if she went before she was one year old. It was storm season, making for a very rough crossing. Because of the weather, the ship docked in Nova Scotia instead of the intended port of Toronto, forcing the bedraggled travelers to take a long train ride to their destination.

They first lived in Cabbagetown, Toronto, and moved 11 times in the 15 years they lived in Ontario while welcoming twins Joanne and Michael to their family. In 1970, Tony cut down trees and built an

A-frame home in a wooded area in Ontario, where the family lived through one terrible winter without running water or electricity before moving on.

In Toronto, his first job was again with Massey-Ferguson. From there, he moved into the construction, steel, telecommunications, and aerospace industries. In the last, his grounding in manufacturing and electrical knowledge, coupled with his RAF military experience, stood him in good stead. He would say that he was a publicator, technical writer, manager, consultant, instructor, and author; and on the side, he taught technical writing at Red River Community College.

In 1980, a job opportunity brought the family to Winnipeg, where they settled in Norwood Flats for more than 20 years. When Tony and Mary became empty nesters, they bought acreage in St. Pierre Jolys. He had the opportunity to work from home but required an internet connection, so one of the very first fiber-optic lines was dug to their property.

In 2008, Tony was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukemia. Fortunately, the new drug Gleevac

gave him 15 years of additional life. Retired and needing to be closer to doctors, they moved to Steinbach, MB. As his hearing diminished, Facebook became the way he connected with old and new friends. He played word games with people all over the globe, and was a constant reader.

He was well-travelled in Canada and the United States and took many trips home to the UK. Tony and Mary did a Eurail trip the year he turned 70, significantly raising the median age at all the hostels they stayed at. He returned to England again for his 80th birthday, not knowing that it would be the last visit.

Throughout his life, Tony was an avid photographer, a skill that he learned from his father and used in work. He also had a great love for technology, cider, the Canadian Forces Snowbirds, and jazz. He was kind, caring, thoughtful, and very stubborn. He always put others first and had a love for his family and

friends that could not be matched. He spent three months at Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach before going home for end-of-life care.

Wednesday, October 18th, 2023, Tony died peacefully at his home at the age of 85. A lifelong jazz aficionado, he was listening to Louis Armstrong when he passed. He leaves his wife of 61 years. Mary; his sister Barbara; three children: Alison, Joanne, and Mike; and nine grandchildren. He had many lifelong friends, and he kept in touch with all his widespread kith and kin throughout his life. A celebration of life will be held August 17, 2024, in Winnipeg, MB.

He always ended his posts with good advice: "Take care, stay safe, enjoy life, and laugh a lot. Cheers for now. Tony." ■